

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter briefly explains some theories that support the study. The theories relate to the Total Physical Response (TPR), vocabulary learning, and students' perceptions.

A. Theoretical Framework

1. Total Physical Response (TPR)

Total Physical Response (TPR) is a language teaching method originally developed by James Asher in the 1960s. It is grounded in the coordination of speech and physical movement, where learners demonstrate comprehension of verbal input by responding through physical actions. This approach imitates the natural process of first language acquisition, in which children listen before speaking and often react physically before producing language (Richards & Rodgers, 1999, as cited in Ha & Hue, 2020). As Dewi and Fatmawati (2022) note, TPR is considered a simple, enjoyable, and effective method that enables learners to grasp the meaning of vocabulary by linking it with bodily movement. Thus, TPR provides a multisensory learning experience that combines auditory, visual, and kinesthetic channels in language learning.

The main principle of TPR lies in giving learners simple commands that they can follow through concrete actions. In classroom practice, teachers model instructions, such as “open the book,” “stand up,” or “close the door,” and students respond physically before attempting to produce the language themselves. Astri (2018) emphasizes that the combination of verbal input and movement encourages active participation and helps students comprehend new concepts more effectively. This principle is particularly suitable for young learners and beginners, as they often have limited attention spans and benefit more from concrete, action-based activities rather than abstract explanations (Ha & Hue, 2020).

There are some key principles of TPR. According to Asher (1969), the principles are as follows:

1. Effectiveness

TPR is effective because it connects language with physical movement, allowing learners to understand and internalize words through action. This method mirrors how children acquire their first language by hearing commands and responding physically before speaking. As a result, learning becomes more natural and less stressful.

2. Enjoyment

TPR activities (like games, songs, and commands) make the classroom interactive and lively. Since students move, laugh, and play while learning, they feel relaxed and more open to using the language. Enjoyment also reduces anxiety, which is one of the biggest barriers to learning a new language

3. Usefulness

TPR focuses on everyday commands and vocabulary (e.g., “stand up,” “open the door,” “pick up your book”), which are immediately useful for basic communication. This practical focus helps learners use the language naturally in real situations.

4. Comprehension

TPR emphasizes listening and understanding before speaking. Learners see and act as they hear the words, helping them grasp meaning without needing translation. This builds strong comprehension skills and supports natural language development.

5. Retention (Memory)

Because TPR links language with physical actions, memory is strengthened through multiple channels: auditory (hearing), visual (seeing), and kinesthetic (doing). This multisensory learning makes vocabulary and phrases easier to recall later.

6. Motivation

TPR naturally increases motivation because it’s active, low-stress, and rewarding. Students see quick progress (they can understand and respond from the first lesson), which boosts confidence and keeps them eager to learn more.

The method offers several advantages. One of its key strengths is its ability to create a stress-free and enjoyable learning atmosphere. Dewi and Fatmawati (2022) found that the use of TPR in vocabulary teaching generated positive responses and enthusiasm among students, as it engaged them in playful activities and movement. Similarly, Çelik et al. (2021) argue that TPR improves vocabulary retention because learners encounter words through multisensory experiences, which reinforces memory. In addition, the interactive nature of TPR fosters motivation and reduces anxiety, thereby making the learning process more effective and meaningful.

Despite its benefits, TPR also has certain limitations. The method is most effective for teaching concrete vocabulary that can be easily demonstrated through physical movement, whereas abstract concepts are more difficult to convey through this approach. Astri (2018) points out that TPR tends to be more suitable for beginners and younger learners rather than advanced students. Moreover, Dewi and Fatmawati (2022) highlight that implementing TPR in online learning settings presents technical challenges, such as limited physical space for movement and reduced direct interaction between teachers and students. These factors suggest that while TPR is effective in many contexts, it cannot be applied universally to all language skills and levels.

In relation to the present study, TPR is highly relevant because it aligns with the aim of exploring junior high school students' perceptions of vocabulary learning in the Indonesian context. Previous research indicates that TPR enhances engagement, enjoyment, and memory in vocabulary learning (Astri, 2018; Dewi & Fatmawati, 2022; Ha & Hue, 2020). Therefore, this study seeks to contribute further insights by examining how ninth-grade students at SMPN 7 Tasikmalaya perceive the use of TPR, particularly regarding its effectiveness, usefulness, and overall impact on their vocabulary development.

2. Vocabulary Learning

a. Definition of Vocabulary

Vocabulary refers to the collection of words and meanings that individuals understand and use. Stahl (2005) states that “vocabulary knowledge is knowledge,”

explaining that understanding a word is not just recognizing its definition, but also understanding how it functions within a broader linguistic and conceptual system. Vocabulary learning is a lifelong process, so it is not something that can be mastered completely at one time. Effective vocabulary teaching goes beyond simply looking up words in a dictionary or using them in sentences. Instead, it involves continuous exposure, meaningful practice, and the use of strategies that help learners expand their vocabulary both intentionally and unintentionally.

In Indonesia, learning English vocabulary is a significant challenge because English is a foreign language rather than the national language. As a result, many students find it difficult to master and remember new words. Research shows that several factors contribute to this difficulty. Riddell (2013) notes that learners often encounter problems with word meaning, form, and pronunciation, while Thornbury (2002) adds that spelling, grammar, word length, complexity, range, meaning, and idiomaticity can also affect difficulty. In addition to linguistic challenges, classroom-related factors also play an important role. First, a teacher-centered approach can make students passive and reluctant to participate. Second, limited media and learning resources reduce student interest and motivation. Third, students with limited vocabulary tend to use the same words repeatedly when speaking or writing, which limits their ability to express ideas clearly (Hasan, 2019).

In the context of Indonesian junior high schools, this process faces a unique pedagogical challenge, as current learning objectives do not explicitly allocate a separate or specific domain for vocabulary instruction. Instead, vocabulary is embedded implicitly within broader text-based and macro-skill competencies. Consequently, the application of Total Physical Response (TPR) in this study focuses on how kinesthetic movements are functionally integrated as an instructional bridge within these existing text-based lessons. By utilizing TPR, teachers can explicitly scaffold the essential vocabulary needed to comprehend texts or perform communicative tasks, without disrupting the core curriculum. This approach allows junior high school students to decipher word functions dynamically through physical actions, making vocabulary acquisition an active,

embedded facilitator for their overall language goals rather than an isolated memorization task.

Given these challenges, educators need to employ effective, engaging methods to support vocabulary learning. When students enjoy the learning process, they are more likely to participate actively, practice new words, and use them confidently in real communication. Therefore, teachers must create meaningful vocabulary learning experiences that help students develop a richer vocabulary and become more capable of expressing their thoughts and feelings both inside and outside the classroom.

b. Types of Vocabulary

Vocabulary can be divided into two main categories. These two types play different roles in language development and are both essential for learners to achieve effective communication. Nation (as cited in Ahmed, 2019) explained these two types of vocabulary as follows:

1. Receptive Vocabulary

Receptive vocabulary refers to words that learners can understand when they hear or read them. Receptive vocabulary is defined as “the idea of taking linguistic input from others by hearing or reading and seeking to interpret it” (Ahmed, 2019). In other words, receptive vocabulary is the ability to recognize and understand a word when it appears in a text or is spoken by others. Learners do not necessarily need to produce these words in speaking or writing, but they must be able to grasp their meanings in context.

This type of vocabulary is crucial in the early stages of language learning because it supports comprehension skills, such as listening and reading. When learners have a wide receptive vocabulary, they can follow conversations, understand instructions, and comprehend reading materials more effectively. Over time, receptive vocabulary can serve as a foundation for developing productive vocabulary.

2. Productive Vocabulary

Productive vocabulary refers to words that learners can actively use in speaking or writing. Productive vocabulary involves the ability to use words

correctly and appropriately in oral or written communication (Ahmed, 2019). Students must not only know the meaning of the vocabulary items but also be able to pronounce or spell them accurately, choose them in the right context, and apply them in grammatically appropriate structures. In this sense, productive vocabulary is considered an active skill, because learners produce language rather than simply recognize it.

Developing productive vocabulary is often more challenging than developing receptive vocabulary. This is because learners must recall words independently and use them to express their ideas, feelings, and intentions. However, when students actively produce vocabulary, they can communicate more confidently, creatively, and effectively. This enables them to participate more fully in classroom activities, discussions, and real-life interactions.

c. Importance of Vocabulary

Vocabulary is undeniably a key component in mastering all aspects of language, including speaking, reading, writing, and listening. Without sufficient vocabulary, learners are unable to express ideas effectively, comprehend messages, or participate in meaningful communication. As Wilkins (1972, as cited in Mart, 2012) famously stated, “without grammar very little can be conveyed, but without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed.” This underscores that vocabulary is the foundation of language proficiency, particularly in second- or foreign-language learning. Vocabulary empowers learners to operate both receptively and productively, enabling them to understand language input and produce meaningful output.

From a receptive standpoint, vocabulary plays a critical role in listening and reading comprehension. Receptive communication relies heavily on the learner’s ability to process linguistic input from oral texts, reading passages, or word lists. To understand these inputs effectively, learners must possess an adequate vocabulary base. Research indicates that learners need to understand at least 95% of the words in a text to achieve reasonable comprehension and infer the meaning of unfamiliar words from context (Nation, 2001). Therefore, learners with limited

vocabulary are likely to struggle with comprehension, leading to fragmented understanding and reduced motivation to engage with texts.

On the other hand, vocabulary is equally essential for productive skills, namely speaking and writing. Productive communication requires learners to retrieve and use appropriate vocabulary accurately and fluently to express ideas, opinions, and feelings. As noted by Wilkins (1972) and emphasized by Mart (2012), words are the primary tools for conveying meaning. Without adequate vocabulary, learners may produce incomplete sentences, repeat the same limited expressions, or avoid communication altogether. A broad vocabulary allows learners to communicate more precisely, creatively, and confidently, which ultimately enhances their overall communicative competence.

In sum, vocabulary plays a central role in language development, influencing both comprehension and communication. It supports learners in understanding language input and equips them with the linguistic resources needed to produce meaningful output. For these reasons, vocabulary mastery should be prioritized in language instruction, especially in EFL contexts where exposure to the target language is limited. Effective vocabulary learning will not only improve students' language skills but also increase their confidence and willingness to communicate.

3. Students' Perception

Students' perceptions are an essential factor in the teaching and learning process because they reflect how learners interpret, evaluate, and respond to instructional methods. Perception can be understood as a psychological process through which individuals interpret and construct meaning from stimuli received through their senses, shaped by prior experiences and personal interpretations (Tunru et al., 2024). In educational contexts, students' perceptions influence how they engage with learning materials, evaluate teaching strategies, and develop attitudes toward the subject being studied. According to Acurio et al. (2023), students' perceptions provide valuable feedback about the effectiveness of instructional methods, as they shape motivation, learning outcomes, and classroom dynamics.

The principles of students' perception emphasize that learning experiences are not only determined by the teacher's strategies but also by how students internalize and respond to them. Perception is shaped by both cognitive and affective factors, meaning that a method may be technically sound, but its success depends on how students experience it in practice (Tunru et al., 2024). For example, when learners find a method enjoyable, relevant, and engaging, they are more likely to perceive it positively, leading to higher participation and better outcomes. Conversely, when students perceive a teaching method as monotonous or ineffective, it may reduce their motivation and hinder the learning process (Acurio et al., 2023).

There are three interrelated aspects of perception. According to Walgito (2003), it consists of cognitive, affective, and conative aspects. These aspects explain that perception does not merely involve receiving information, but also includes how individuals think, feel, and behave in response to certain stimuli. In the context of education, these three aspects help explain how students interpret learning experiences and respond to teaching methods during the learning process.

a. Cognitive

It refers to students' understanding, interpretation, and evaluation of learning experiences based on their knowledge and thinking processes. This aspect is closely related to how students process information, recognize the usefulness of instructional methods, and determine whether a learning activity supports their understanding. In classroom settings, students cognitively assess whether teaching strategies are clear, relevant, and suitable for their learning needs. Therefore, students' perceptions toward learning methods are often shaped by how effectively those methods help them comprehend materials and achieve academic goals.

b. Affective

It involves students' emotions, feelings, attitudes, and levels of interest toward the learning process. Positive emotions such as enjoyment, enthusiasm, and curiosity may encourage students to engage more actively in classroom activities, while negative feelings such as boredom, anxiety, or frustration may

reduce motivation and participation. This aspect highlights that students' emotional responses significantly influence how they perceive the effectiveness of instructional methods. When learners feel comfortable and interested in the learning environment, they are more likely to develop positive perceptions and stronger engagement in the learning process.

c. Conative

It refers to students' behavioral tendencies or actions resulting from their perceptions and experiences. This aspect is reflected in how students respond behaviorally to learning activities, such as participating in discussions, asking questions, practicing independently, or adapting learning strategies to overcome difficulties. In educational contexts, positive perceptions often encourage students to demonstrate active learning behaviors and a greater willingness to engage with instructional activities. Thus, the conative aspect emphasizes that perception not only influences thoughts and feelings but also shapes learners' actions and learning decisions throughout the educational process.

The advantages of examining students' perceptions include understanding their motivation, engagement, and satisfaction in the learning process. As Ningrum (2021) noted, students who positively perceive teaching methods such as TPR report increased enjoyment, active participation, and ease in memorizing vocabulary. Similarly, Tunru et al. (2024) found that most junior high school students in Makassar held positive perceptions of the TPR method, highlighting its role in fostering a fun, active, and supportive classroom environment. However, a limitation of relying on students' perceptions is their subjectivity; perceptions may be influenced by individual differences such as learning style, prior experiences, or even mood during the learning activity (Acurio et al., 2023). Therefore, while students' perceptions are valuable indicators, they must be triangulated with other forms of data, such as performance outcomes.

In relation to the present study, exploring students' perceptions of using the TPR method in vocabulary learning is highly relevant. In this research, students' perceptions are defined as the multidimensional process through which learners

interpret and evaluate the implementation of TPR based on three psychological aspects proposed by Walgito: cognitive, affective, and conative. By focusing on these perceptions, the study aims to provide deep insights into how learners understand the concept and meaning of the vocabulary taught (cognitive aspect), how they emotionally respond to the learning atmosphere, such as their levels of enjoyment and confidence (affective aspect), and how the method drives their behavioral intentions or proactive engagement in class (conative aspect). While previous studies have shown the general effectiveness of TPR in enhancing vocabulary acquisition, few have specifically addressed how junior high school students perceive its use through these three lenses in the Indonesian classroom context. Understanding these integrated perceptions will ultimately highlight whether TPR fosters a holistic learning experience that aligns with students' expectations and contributes to successful vocabulary learning.

B. Study of the Relevant Research

Several related studies have significance to this topic. A relevant study by Siahaan et al. (2025) examined the effectiveness of the Total Physical Response (TPR) method in improving seventh graders' vocabulary and understanding of imperative sentences. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the researchers collected data through observations, documentation, and classroom activities such as vocabulary practice and games. The results showed that students were able to recall more than 20 new words, write 11 imperative sentences, and participate more actively with greater confidence and enjoyment. However, the researchers also noted challenges, including limited time and varying student proficiency levels. Overall, the study concluded that TPR effectively improved students' vocabulary and sentence structure skills while creating a fun learning environment, and suggested better time management and grouping strategies for future research.

Another relevant study was conducted by Megawati and Jazila (2024), which aimed to investigate how the TPR method could enhance vocabulary learning among primary school students. Using a Classroom Action Research design, data were collected through observation sheets, vocabulary tests, and field notes across two learning cycles. The data were then analyzed using descriptive qualitative

methods to identify students' learning progress and responses. The findings revealed that TPR increased students' engagement, enthusiasm, and motivation, leading to better vocabulary retention, as evidenced by improved test scores from cycle one to cycle two. However, the researchers noted challenges in maintaining classroom discipline due to students' high energy during physical activities. Therefore, they recommended that future research focus on developing more effective classroom management strategies when applying TPR.

Another related study was conducted by Yuquilema (2020), which aimed to address students' limited English vocabulary development and evaluate the effectiveness of the TPR method in improving vocabulary acquisition. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were gathered through classroom observations, teacher interviews, and student performance assessments, and were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns in student behavior and learning outcomes. The findings showed that TPR significantly enhanced students' vocabulary comprehension, recall, and motivation. Students became more participative, confident, and less anxious when learning through physical movement and commands, which supported long-term retention. However, the study also reported challenges related to varying learning speeds, as some students required additional reinforcement to achieve mastery. Therefore, the researcher suggested that future studies incorporate differentiated instruction and extend the intervention period to better accommodate students' diverse learning needs.

Another relevant study was conducted by Setiawan (2024), which aimed to examine the implementation of TPR in teaching vocabulary to junior high school students, and the challenges encountered in its application. Employing a qualitative classroom-based approach, data were collected through observations, interviews, and student feedback and were analyzed using descriptive qualitative methods to interpret classroom interactions, student responses, and teacher experiences. The findings revealed that students were highly enthusiastic and actively engaged when learning vocabulary through TPR. They demonstrated better vocabulary retention and recalled words more effectively than with traditional instruction. However, the study also noted several challenges, including time-consuming preparation,

classroom management difficulties, and the need for continuous teacher creativity to sustain student interest. The researcher concluded that although TPR is an effective strategy for increasing motivation and improving vocabulary retention, future research should focus on developing more structured lesson plans that support better time management and enhance classroom control.

In summary, the four studies consistently show that the TPR method positively impacts students' vocabulary mastery, motivation, and classroom engagement. Although they used different research designs, such as classroom action research and qualitative descriptive methods, and gathered data through tests, observations, documentation, and interviews, their findings were similar. The results indicated that TPR helps improve vocabulary retention, lowers students' anxiety, and increases enthusiasm during learning. However, these studies also reported several challenges, including classroom management issues, differences in students' learning pace, and the time required for lesson preparation. Furthermore, most of the research focused on learning outcomes rather than students' personal views. Therefore, this study addresses that gap by exploring junior high school students' perceptions of TPR in vocabulary learning, particularly its effectiveness, enjoyment, and usefulness for improving vocabulary comprehension and retention.